

## **Terminology for AIMS Scoring**

The following terms and phrases are used in the rubric and/or annotations and may need further explanation for teachers who are not familiar with them. In some cases, the terms may be used in a slightly different way than other sources. Reading the explanation for these terms will help further clarify the reason a paper received the score point it did, as well as provide a sense of the many elements scorers consider as they read a paper.

**audience:** This term refers to the intended reader or readers for whom a piece is written. A writer can show "audience awareness" in a variety of ways. Some of these include identifying characters and places as they appear in a narrative, giving readers clear time markers so they can easily follow a sequence of events, defining technical terms or jargon with which readers might be unfamiliar, tying thoughts or events together for a reader with insightful comments, and generally providing readers with sufficient information to make the writing clear.

**best fit:** This term is used in holistic scoring for a paper that may have characteristics of several different score points. For example, a paper may have some features that are at a 2 level while other features may seem to be at the 3 level. The paper would receive a score of 2 or 3 depending on the score point of the rubric that most accurately describes the attributes of the paper. A scorer would also consider whether the 2- and 3- level elements were in the high or low range of those score points. Ultimately, the paper would be given the "best fit" score. It has elements of both score points but, overall, is it more like a 2 or more like a 3?

**borderline papers:** Within each score point there will be a range of papers that represent the lower, middle, and upper levels of that score. Papers that represent the middle level are often referred to as "solid" examples. Papers representing the extreme lower or upper levels are sometimes called borderline papers because they fall between two score points. In other words, a 2/3 borderline paper has some 2-level characteristics and some 3-level characteristics. Ultimately, of course, a scorer must assign the paper a 2 or a 3. Scorers are cautioned, however, to remember that the score represents the skill that is demonstrated and to make every effort to discern between the two score points fairly.

**cohesiveness:** A paper that gives the sense of completeness with no extra details and no details missing might be said to have cohesiveness. A paper that lacks cohesiveness may have an abrupt or no ending, an introduction that doesn't connect to the body of the paper, serious gaps in the story leaving a reader with unanswered questions, or a switch in topic mid-way to a completely different topic.

**control:** Score points in the rubric and annotations use the term "control" to describe the writer's ability to use a given feature of written language effectively.

**conventions:** This term covers punctuation, capitalization, grammar and usage, and paragraphing. Often referred to as mechanics, conventions are grade level influenced and

Strand 2 Concept 6 of the Writing Standard in the specific grade level should be consulted when assigning scores. If a student has not been exposed to the conventions of semi-colons or pronoun-antecedent agreement, scoring should be reflective of the lack of exposure.

**density of errors:** The shorter a paper is, the more the density of errors it has and density of errors affects a reader's overall impression of the paper. In other words, a paper that consists of 5 sentences with a total of 12 errors might be said to have a greater density of errors than a paper three pages long with a total of 12 errors. Scorers must, however, weigh the number of errors accordingly. Repeated errors are "counted" only once. For instance, if the word "competent" is misspelled as "competant" more than one time, it is still one error – the writer does not spell "competent" correctly. Also, the writer may not punctuate introductory phrases and clauses with a comma; no matter how many times this occurs, it is still only one error – the student does not understand this placement of a comma. The misuse of a word may occur several times in a paper; it is one error.

**fluency:** This refers to the overall rhythm and flow of a paper and takes into consideration features such as word choice, sentence structure and variation, transitions, organizational strategy, and focus. A test of fluency might be reading the paper aloud and listening to how easily and smoothly it reads. Well-controlled fluency generally means there are few or no awkward moments where the reader stumbles.

**information, details, and explanations:** Specific, purposefully chosen information, details, and explanation help to propel the reader through a piece of writing. A paper lacking information, giving too much information, or repeating ideas will affect the reader negatively. General, limited information, details, or explanations affects the reader negatively, also; it presents an empty, generic paper that reveals very little substance.

**organization:** Organization is the structure that facilitates presentation of the main idea. This characteristic takes into account the way a piece of writing is arranged and ordered. A response requires a beginning (introduction of main idea/thesis), a middle (body), and an end (conclusion). Transitions range from formulaic (e.g., first, next, finally, then) to sophisticated (e.g., in addition to, subsequently, comparatively, and skillful repetition of words or phrases between sentences). Sequencing smoothly from one idea to the next happens both within paragraphs and the response as a whole.

**precise or specific vocabulary:** Words or phrases are purposefully chosen and carefully placed by the writer to resonate as images in the reader's mind or to make a point with total commitment and affirmation. Relying on overused words and phrases such as very, very much, a lot, some, things, and simple "to be" verbs generally results in a vague and generic development of ideas. Word choice, along with sentence fluency supports the voice and tone of a paper.

**sentence structure and variety:** Sentence structure and variety are features that include standard word order, completeness, variation in beginnings and lengths, and complexity in type

of sentence (simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex). Fluent sentences enhance the ideas and guide the reader through the paper without confusion. It also plays a part in voice and tone. More sophisticated writers may purposefully use fragments for effect.

**tone:** A writer's tone might be described as somber, tongue-in-cheek, formal, casual, ironic, melodramatic, etc. The tone is a result of the writer's word choice and sentence structure. For example, a piece of writing using slang or colloquialisms might be considered casual. It could be an appropriate tone for a narrative, a personal letter, or an informal essay. Sometimes, students attempt a lofty, academic tone in their writing that generally produces stilted prose since the word choices and sentence constructions may be awkward or incorrect. For example, "One's choice of a college could well depend on where one's parents attended or that of which one's own siblings," An uneven tone occurs when a student mixes casual and formal terminology. For example, "I threw myself forward down the precipice. Every nerve was shrieking, "Stop, stop. Dang it all, Stop." A flat tone is characterized by ordinary word choices, repetitive and often simple sentence structure, and an overall lack of vitality in the writer's voice. It is also sometimes called "generic" since a flat tone gives no indication of a writer's unique personality. A tone closest to the student's own voice generally produces the most genuine type of writing.

**voice:** A writer's voice comes from the elements that contribute to the overall impression of the writer's presence as it comes through in one particular piece of writing. Word choice, sentence structure, organizational strategy, details, insight, tone, and approach to the topic all work together to create a writer's voice. A writer's voice can and often does change depending on the piece's audience and purpose, although more experienced writers tend to have a similar voice in all of their writing. Writer's voice and tone (see above) are extremely closely related and depend on many of the same elements.